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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 VILNIUS 000276

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR EUR/NB, CA/VO, FSI/SPAS/CON
WARSAW FOR LAPIASCIK

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: CVIS PREL LH
SUBJECT: VISA WAIVER PROGRAM: LITHUANIA ACCEPTS ROADMAP,
WANTS CONSULTATIONS IN U.S.

REFS: A. STATE 26010

1B. VILNIUS 162
1C. VILNIUS 139

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The GOL, initially hesitant to pursue a formal agreement, is now anxious to accept the VWP roadmap following the model of other countries in the region. MFA officials remain very interested in arranging U.S. consultations, to examine both biometric security and "customer service" elements of our consular training, for a group of Lithuanian officials. We stressed that a public campaign to discourage visa misuse would be a critical element of the roadmap, and the MFA pledged its willingness to undertake such an effort, especially in cooperation with us. The MFA would also like the USG to form an official Progress Evaluation Team to serve as a review mechanism for VWP progress. The GOL understands that VWP accession will not come in the immediate future, but is searching for concrete steps, such as consultations in the United States on consular issues, to help lay the groundwork and demonstrate some progress. END SUMMARY.

Lithuania Happy with Roadmap

12. (SBU) We met with Vaidotas Verba, Director of the MFA's Consular Department, on March 8 to discuss Lithuania's roadmap for the Visa Waiver Program. Although the MFA had previously expressed a desire to avoid a formal roadmap agreement (ref B), Verba said that after further deliberations the GOL was now eager to accept a formal roadmap in line with other countries in the region (ref A).

Strong Desire for Biometric and Consular Consultations

13. (SBU) Verba reiterated GOL interest in arranging a visit for Lithuanian officials, likely representatives from both the MFA and Interior Ministry, to the United States for consultations on biometric security features. This visit, said Verba, should be a key element of the roadmap introduction and allow the GOL to present its progress in introducing biometric security features for Lithuanian passports. He also confirmed GOL interest in sending consular and migration officials to experience "customer service" elements of USG consular training.

Planning for Public Campaign Against Visa Misuse

14. (SBU) We stressed that a GOL public campaign to discourage visa misuse and overstay by Lithuanians would be an important element of the roadmap. Verba responded that the GOL was willing to undertake such a campaign, noting that the MFA had already released some public statements on the issue, but that the entire government still had to consider the matter. He also asked if the Embassy would be willing to join a public campaign as a joint effort. We noted our already robust public diplomacy efforts to promote proper visa use and said that we would be happy to participate with the GOL in joint appearances on this subject.

VWP Review Mechanism

15. (SBU) Noting that the USG-proposed roadmap makes reference to a "periodic review" of progress toward the VWP, Verba asked if the USG would consider forming an official Progress Evaluation Team to make regular visits to Lithuania and evaluate progress. This group, Verba maintained, would create a mechanism for VWP review and help convince Lithuanian citizens that the process is ongoing. We promised to relay Verba's request, but encouraged him to discuss the concept in more detail, including with his

counterparts from other countries of the region, in order to better define the objectives of such a group.

Roadmap Rollout

16. (SBU) Verba said that the GOL was planning a public statement to present the roadmap, suggesting that FM Valionis might want to do so in conjunction with a U.S. official. Subsequently, on March 15, Verba passed us a draft for a Lithuania-specific roadmap agreement, which tracked very closely with the document passed to Baltic ambassadors in Washington. However, Lithuania's draft adds two points, one describing the formation of a permanent U.S. Progress Evaluation Team, and the other stating U.S. willingness to explore the possibility of expanding exchange programs. The Lithuanian-drafted document also expands the original U.S. offer of "technical advice and assistance" to "assistance in training of Lithuanian consular, migration, and border officials."

Comment: Change in Tone, Not Substance

17. (SBU) Although the MFA has reversed its earlier reluctance to enter into a formal agreement regarding VWP, the substance of the GOL position has not significantly changed. The GOL understands that VWP accession will not come in the immediate future. In the meantime, Lithuanian officials want to pursue concrete steps, such as consultations in the United States on consular issues, to help lay the groundwork. We appreciate Department's and other posts' assistance in developing a consultative program in line with Lithuanian and U.S. interests.

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